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## El Salvador: Major Towns and Other Important Features

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A Geographic Reference Aid

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## A Geographic Reference Aid

*Information available as of 23 March 1982  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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This reference aid was prepared by   
 Office of Global Issues. Comments and  
queries are welcome, and may be directed to the  
Chief, Geography Division, OGI

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### Populated Places

The following cities and towns are the most important population centers in El Salvador. Population figures are given in parentheses following each name. The population figures were derived from official 1978 Salvadoran estimates projected through 1981 by assuming an annual growth rate of 4 percent. The map grid reference follows each place name.

**Acajutla -F3-** (15,000) is the most important port for both imports and exports. It contains the country's only oil refinery in addition to important fish, food, and fertilizer processing facilities and a large cement complex. Acajutla is the terminus of a railroad connecting the Pacific Ocean with the Caribbean Sea via Santo Tomas de Castilla, Guatemala. A thermal power plant with a capacity of 69,600 kW is available to supplement national electrical supplies when necessary.

**Aguilares -D6-** (10,000) is a major commercial and processing center for an important sugar producing area. It bestrides the railroad line to Guatemala as well as the paved highway connecting the western portions of El Salvador and Honduras.

**Ahuachapan -D3-** (22,000) is the capital of the department of the same name and serves as the commercial hub of one of the country's main coffee producing areas. A spur from Santa Ana ties it to the national railway system and a paved road ties it to Guatemala and Santa Ana. Some 10 kilometers west of the city in an area of geysers and hot springs is a 90,000-kW geothermal plant that accounts for almost 20 percent of the national generating capacity.

**Chalatenango -D7-** (11,000) is a department capital and service center for a large but generally poor area of subsistence farming and livestock raising. Nearby are the Cerron Grande and 5 de Noviembre hydroelectric facilities.

**Chalchuapa -D3-** (26,000) is a market center for coffee and cattle in western El Salvador. It lies on the highway and the railroad connecting Santa Ana with Ahuachapan. It is of tourist and archeological interest because of nearby Mayan ruins.

**Cojutepeque -E7-** (30,000) straddles the Inter-American Highway east of San Salvador and also the only railroad linking the eastern and western parts of the country. A historic town with numerous cottage industries, it was once the temporary capital of El Salvador and is now the capital of Cuscatlan Department.

**Ilobasco -E8-** (10,000) serves a hinterland of small farms and ranches. Famous for its pottery, it is a key juncture in the road network linking north-central El Salvador with the remainder of the country.

**La Libertad -G5-** (12,000) was once the country's chief port, but it no longer serves as a focus of international commerce, although the antiquated facilities continue to be important to the local fishing industry. It is a popular weekend resort.

**La Union/Cutuco -G13-** (26,000) are twin cities and ports on the Gulf of Fonseca. In addition to serving international commerce, they are important to the fishing industry and food processing capacity of the country. La Union is the capital of the department of the same name and the site of El Salvador's most important naval base.

**Metapan -B5-** (12,000) lies south of Cerro Monte-cristo, astride rail and highway connections with Guatemala. The surrounding area is dominated by small commercial and subsistence farms, but it also contains numerous cattle ranches. West of the city is one of the country's major cement plants. The Guayoyo Hydroelectric Plant (15,000 kW) lies south of the city at Lake Guija.

**Sensuntepeque -D9-** (11,000) is the capital of Cabanas Department. A pottery and distilling center, it is the chief commercial town in a generally poor and sparsely populated area of small subsistence farms.

**San Francisco Gotera -E12-** (7,000) is the capital of Morazan Department and the chief commercial town of a poor region dominated by subsistence farming and cattle raising. Some coffee is produced in the highlands to the northwest. The town is located along a key road connecting the Inter-American Highway with small insurgent-encircled settlements such as Perquin near the Honduran border.

**San Miguel -G11-** (90,000) serves as the capital of San Miguel Department and is the largest city of eastern El Salvador. Some small-scale mining is carried out in the area, but agriculture (especially sisal, cotton, and coffee) dominates the surrounding landscape and supports numerous related industries in the city. It is a major transportation center on the Inter-American Highway and the only railroad serving eastern El Salvador. The city contains a major transformer station linking eastern El Salvador with the national electrical network.

**San Salvador -E6-** (1,000,000) is the national capital and chief commercial, industrial, and transportation center of the country. The city itself contains some half million people, but has expanded to encompass nine nearby urban areas, including Nueva San Salvador (also known as Santa Tecla), Soyopango, and Mejicanos. The population of the metropolitan area accounts for 20 percent of the national total.

**San Vicente -F8-** (26,000) is the capital of its department and a historic Indian center strategically located near the Inter-American Highway as well as along the railroad serving eastern El Salvador. It is a major commercial center for a wide area producing sugar, coffee, corn, and rice.

**Santa Ana -D4-** (135,000) is El Salvador's second largest city. It contains important clothing and footwear plants as well as coffee processing facilities. It serves one of the country's richest agricultural areas, where coffee, sugar, meat, and cereals are produced in large quantities. The capital of its department, it is the railhead of a line to Ahuachapan and is situated along both highway and railroad routes to Guatemala. An important electrical transformer linking the Ahuachapan and Guayoyo plants with the national electrical grid is located in the city.

**Sonsonate -E3-** (50,000) is the commercial and industrial (textiles and food processing) center of one of El Salvador's richest agricultural areas. Coffee, sugar, cotton, and cattle are produced on medium-sized and large estates, many of the latter now functioning as cooperatives. The capital of the department of Sonsonate, it is situated along the railroad that leads from the coast at Acajutla to the interior and to Guatemala; in addition, Sonsonate lies on a major highway

connecting San Salvador with Guatemala. The city also serves as a vital link in the electrical grid, connecting the Acajutla thermal plant and the Ahuachapan geothermal plant with the national network.

**Suchitoto -D7-** (8,000) lies about 40 kilometers from San Salvador, in close proximity to Guazapa volcano and to the Cerron Grande hydroelectric complex. It serves a hinterland of diversified farming. Suchitoto has become a recurring focus of the insurgency.

**Usulután -G10-** (30,000) is the capital of Usulután Department and a major leather products center. It serves a rich area of cotton, coffee, and livestock enterprises. It is located between the volcanic range much frequented by the guerrillas to the north and their supply corridors originating in the Bahía de Jiquilisco and adjacent beaches to the south. It bestrides the Coastal Highway as well as the railroad linking eastern El Salvador with the remainder of the country.

**Zacatecoluca -F8-** (15,000) is the capital of La Paz Department. Noted for its tobacco products, textiles, and tapestries, it not only acts as a major commercial center for rich cotton lands to the south and coffee lands to the north, but also serves as a transportation hub along the Coastal Highway and the railroad connecting eastern portions of the country with the central and western portions.

### Major Transport Routes

**National Railroad.** Stretching across 600 kilometers, the 3-foot-gauge national railway routes pass over some 200 bridges and through eight tunnels. The eastern portion connects La Unión/Cutuco with San Salvador via five department capitals. The better developed western portion links Santa Ana, Acajutla, and neighboring Guatemala with San Salvador, where the most important repair and switching facilities are located. Insurgent attacks on railroad bridges as well as rolling stock have severely hindered service throughout El Salvador.

**Inter-American Highway.** A major factor in commerce within Central America, the Inter-American Highway traverses the length of El Salvador by way of the Central Plateau from San Cristobal, on the

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border with Guatemala, to El Amatillo, on the border with Honduras. Its course brings it to, or within a few kilometers of, half of the country's 14 department capitals.

**Coastal Highway.** More or less paralleling the Inter-American Highway but passing south of El Salvador's volcanic range, this major link in the transportation network is known locally as the Littoral Highway. From La Hachadura on the border with Guatemala to La Union, the Coastal Highway serves some of the country's richest agricultural areas. Some half dozen connecting roads link it with the Inter-American Highway as well as such commercial and population centers as Sonsonate, San Salvador, and San Miguel.

#### Other Important Features

**Bahia de Jiquilisco -H10-** forms nearly the entire coast of Usulután Department. Famous for its fishing, centered at the port of El Triunfo, its mangrove-fringed shores are now much used by insurgents for smuggling in supplies.

**Cerro Montecristo -B5-** the highest point in El Salvador (2,650 meters) is located at the point where the borders of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador meet.

**Cerrón Grande Hydroelectric Facility -D8-** is located on the Rio Lempa about 20 kilometers from the Honduran border. It produces 135,000 kW, 29 percent of El Salvador's total output. A highway over the dam connects the departments of Cabanas and Chalatenango.

**Cinco (5) de Noviembre Hydroelectric Facility -D8-** is located on the Rio Lempa, down river from the reservoir of the Cerrón Grande hydroelectric complex. The dam and 82,000-kW power plant are only some 10 kilometers from the border with Honduras. The facility accounts for 17 percent of the national generating capacity.

**Conchagua -H13-** is a 1,300-meter volcano in eastern El Salvador south of the ports of La Union and Cutuco. Its rugged character and close proximity to Nicaragua invite its use for insurgent infiltration and supply routes.

**Cordillera de Jucuarán -H12-** is a range of generally low (less than 1,000 meters) but rugged mountains of the southeast adjacent to Playas El Cuco and El Espino, both of which are not only tourist havens but also sites of major guerrilla supply drops.

**Puente Cuscatlán -F9-** on the Inter-American Highway, is one of only two functioning bridges over the Rio Lempa.

**Puente de Oro -G9-** destroyed by guerrillas last October, was the Coastal Highway bridge over the Rio Lempa. As a substitute, the nearby railroad bridge has been converted to handle road traffic.

**Rio Lempa -G9-** rises in Guatemala and forms a small portion of El Salvador's border with Honduras. It also divides the eastern third of the country from the central and western portions. Navigable only by small craft, it is not a major transportation artery for commercial traffic, but guerrillas use it to ship supplies inland from the coast. The river's flow is exploited by the Cerrón Grande and 5 de Noviembre hydroelectric complexes to provide El Salvador with nearly half of its electricity.

#### Areas of Insurgency

The map shows the locations of the largest concentrations of guerrillas in El Salvador as of March 1982. Generally, these concentrations are in the more remote and sparsely settled parts of the country. None of the country's major population centers lies within an area of guerrilla control, although many are vulnerable to guerrilla attack.



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